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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

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EXTENSION AS A PROFESSION*

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On November 1 of this year, over 8,200 technically trained men and women were engaged in Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics in the United States. Of this number, nearly 3,900 are county agricultural agents and assistant agents, over 1,900 are home demonstration agents, 327 are county 4-H club agents, 1,451 are extension specialists, and the remainder are supervisors and directors. Funds are in sight for increasing this number of agents for each of the next 3 years. It is not beyond the possibilities that by 1940 we shall have close to 10,000 agents in Cooperative Extension Work.

And, when this number is reached in 1940, we shall find it to be the barest minimum required to do in the scantiest way the job that is ever opening up before us in the Extension field. Our job has been, and is, to help farm men and women increase their scanty incomes and make homes. We know that there is not much money in farming; that nearly 50 percent of farm people of the United States sell a total of less than \$1,000 worth of produce from their farms yearly; that only about 3 out of 100 farmers sell as much as \$5,000 worth of produce yearly; and that, if we were successful, through all our science and technique, in doubling the income of farmers - a goal much beyond our dreams, there still would not be large money in farming. Farmers still would need to be frugal in their expenditures and ever practice the virtues of thrift and economy.

There is a wealth we can bring rural people, however, that doesn't cost much, and this we should give them. While helping farmers to increase their income is a fundamental part of our Extension goal, our further task is to bring to rural people enrichment of mind and spirit, to bring to them wealth of knowledge whereby men truly live and satisfy the highest aspirations of life; and a man's wealth lies not so much in his land and his goods as in his hopes and his aspirations, his ambitions and dreams. We enrich men when we help them to see and to understand the world in which they live. A man has wealth when he has the love of family, friends, the respect of his neighbors, the admiration of his colleagues. We enrich men when we give them courage and faith in themselves and the work they are doing; and, if we can help them to sing and play and have profitable converse with one another, we have brought them wealth and satisfaction and values which money can't buy.

*Given at Southern Extension Conference, Houston, Tex., November 13, 1936.

And this we conceive to be the function of Extension agents: To teach the things the law requires and to add to this teaching, themselves. Forty years ago we took advanced work in chemistry. We never have used and have completely forgotten the technical chemistry we learned at that time; but the man who taught us still lives in our heart and in the hearts of a thousand other students, and will continue to live on down through the ages to come. He knew not only chemistry and teaching, but was also a man who stood for something worth while. That is the kind of teachers we want in Extension, and that is the kind of teachers we have in an unusual degree in Extension - men and women who know their subjects and themselves live and impart the inspiring life; men and women who live and will continue to live in the hearts and minds of the people they serve through the years to come, because they stand for something in life worth while.

What is the task before us in continuing to get and train men and women for this great job of Extension? We need from 800 to 1,000 each year. Graduation from a regular 4-year course in agriculture or home economics would seem to be an essential. Extension directors know, of course, that only about one out of each six men or women who graduate have the personality and teacher qualifications for an Extension agent. With increasing demands made on Extension forces for a broader interpretation of Extension, especially in the counties, it is most desirable that every prospective Extension agent take an extra year or two at the university, fitting themselves more fully in the fields of education, economics, sociology, philosophy, science, and letters. Most of us need a far broader background than we have to serve most efficiently in Extension. Beginning, then, first as a graduate, with a year or so extra work as an apprentice in the county, and returning to the university from time to time to take further work in special subjects, you have the beginning of an Extension teacher. It takes 6 or 7 years of college training these days to make a doctor or a lawyer. Extension agents who keep pace with future needs will also have to spend 6 or 7 years in preparation. Farmers are growing as we continue to work with them in Extension. If we meet their needs we must give them more than just agriculture. We must be more broadly prepared.

Some other essentials of Extension teachers are that they be in full sympathy with the rural people they serve; the men or women who would not like, themselves, to own a farm and live a rural life cannot hope to make the most successful teachers in Extension.

In a North Carolina county, the farm women at one of their regular home demonstration meetings called aside the State supervisor, and told her they were about to let their home demonstration agent go. When asked the reason, the women replied: "Because she doesn't love us." Farm women and farm men want to work with agents who sympathize with them and their problems and have a love for them and for farm work in their hearts.

The agent, also, who looks upon Extension as a job, rather than an opportunity to serve his fellow men, will not get the most out of his life work. He is likely to be just another teacher.

I don't know much about the future life; but I do know that the Extension agents who are real men or real women, who love the people they work with, who are patient, human, and competent are as likely to gain immortality as any human being in the world. And that is one of the great rewards of Extension. There is a great craving in every man's heart to live on. That is why men build monuments. They want to be remembered. I know of no surer way to live on than to be a good Extension agent.

Going back, now, for a moment to the matter of apprenticeship for those who would become Extension agents. With the passage of the Bankhead-Jones Act, most of the States have substantial increases in Extension funds.

Now that it is thus made possible to employ assistants in counties, definite steps may well be taken to provide a reasonable number of apprenticeship positions to be filled by promising men and women, fresh from their college training, who desire to obtain experience in their chosen career through association for a year or two at a nominal salary with successful extension workers. The providing of such apprenticeship positions, as is now being done in many States with Bankhead-Jones and other Extension funds, should result also in stimulating interest in undergraduate courses, relating specifically to Extension teaching, and will insure an available supply of candidates with Extension experience to be drawn upon in filling vacancies in positions of county agricultural and county home demonstration agents. Assistant agents will also make it possible for county workers to get away more readily from time to time for short periods of graduate study at the university.

In addition to a limited number of special undergraduate courses for prospective Extension workers offered in all the larger State agricultural colleges, in-service training on a graduate basis should be provided at some six or seven of those institutions best suited by location and teaching facilities to serve as training centers for groups of States.

The agricultural colleges are having a struggle to know just how to classify and rank Extension agents as representatives of the institution. As we approach the time when all salary of every Extension agent will be paid from State and Federal funds, I think this matter of rank and title will receive increasing attention. Extension agents are clearly recognized as teachers of the college; but where do they stand as compared with professors, associate and assistant professors, and heads of departments? The teaching that county agents do, while different from college course teaching, would seem to require as broad training, and even more diversity and adaptability than that required of the college professor. If the county agent succeeds, he or she must succeed because of teaching ability, knowledge, and character. The college professor usually covers but one field of learning. The county agent must give help in many fields of learning.

I was told recently by the assistant director of Oregon that in that institution the best county agents now rank with full professors in the college, both in salary and academic standing. Moreover, the college is increasingly seeking its professors for the institution out of the ranks of the county agents.

While Extension agents have not been clamoring for rank, it does add to the morale of the staff to know that they are looked upon by the institution as on a par with the highest paid and highest ranking members of the college staff itself. We hope the practice thus begun of giving Extension agents substantial academic rank and of employing those with county agent training as professors and heads of departments may spread rapidly throughout the country. I think it will very substantially vitalize much of our college teaching and add greatly to the morale of Extension agents.

You may be interested in knowing the salaries men and women with college training secure, on the average, in the various professions.

Comparison With Incomes of Other Professional Workers

If the income or other reward which a person receives compares favorably with that received by other professional workers who have similar training and experience, he usually is contented in his work; provided, of course, the same prestige is ascribed to his profession as is ascribed to other comparable vocations.

The available data make it necessary to make the comparison of the salaries of Extension with the incomes of other professions, for the period 1927-28, or thereabouts. That period is a more satisfactory one, perhaps, than the past few years, since it represents a more stable situation.

The median incomes of specified professions for the pre-depression period are in part as follows in table 1.

Table 1.--Comparison of median incomes in specified professions

Profession	Median income
Dentistry: All practitioners	\$ 4,094
Engineering: General practitioners	2,970
Law: General practitioners	3,915
Medicine: All practitioners	4,558
Ministry: Disciples of Christ and Congregational (combined)	2,003
Social work: Family case workers	1,745
Teaching: Junior-high and senior-high teachers and principals	2,318
Staff, colleges and universities	2,759
Y.M.C.A.: All secretaries	3,052
Average of professional, non-Government incomes ...	3,082

From: Compensation in the Professions. Lester W. Bartlett and
Mildred B. Neel. Association Press, New York City.
Salary data largely for period 1927, 1928, and 1929.

Table 2 presents the average salary of different classes of
Extension workers.

Table 2.--Salaries of extension workers December 31, 1928

Kind of extension worker	Average salary
Extension director	\$ 5,317
County agricultural agent leader	4,107
Assistant county agent leader	3,608
Home demonstration leader	3,499
Assistant home demonstration leader	2,859
State club leader	3,528
County agricultural agent	2,818
County home demonstration agent	2,251
County club agent	2,263
Subject-matter specialists	2,983

The salary of the average county agricultural agent is much higher
than that of the average minister, social worker, or high-school teacher;
approximately the same as that of the average college and university
staff member and the engineer; but lower than that of the doctor, the
dentist, and the lawyer.

But, of even greater interest probably to Extension workers is a comparison of their salaries with those of the teaching staff of land-grant colleges and universities. The mean salaries of such teachers are presented by rank and sex in table 3.

Table 3.--Median salaries of teachers by rank and sex for all fields of study combined

Academic rank	Median salaries		
	Men	Women	Both sexes
Dean	\$5,635	\$4,375	\$5,533
Professor	4,139	3,581	4,114
Associate professor	3,284	2,882	3,228
Assistant professor	2,795	2,530	2,725
Instructor	2,087	2,016	2,069
All ranks	3,139	2,309	3,041

From: Salaries in Land-Grant Universities and Colleges. John H. McNeely. Nov. 1931. U. S. Dept. Interior, Off. Ed. Pamphlet no. 24, 27 pp., 1932.

The salary of the Extension director is about the same as that of the dean of teaching. The average salary of the State supervisory staff corresponds very closely with that of a full professor. A subject-matter specialist draws a salary about equal to that of an associate professor. The salary of the county agricultural agent is only slightly above that of the man assistant professor, while the salary of the home demonstration agent is about halfway between that of the woman instructor and the woman assistant professor.

In general, Extension salaries are slightly below those of the teaching staff of corresponding rank. In addition, Extension people work 11 months instead of on the usual 9-month basis for the teaching staff.

While further adjustment in the salaries of county Extension workers, particularly home demonstration agents, is desirable, the remuneration of the Extension job would seem to be such as to encourage a person to make it his or her life career.

Working Conditions

One usually associates the term "profession" with working conditions which make it possible for the individual to exercise a great deal of initiative and to grow and develop mentally.

During the earlier years of Extension, the work has been primarily a young person's job. The long hours of work, physical conditions of roads, weather and distance, inadequate equipment, unstable local appropriations, and the almost limitless task to be done, all contributed to forcing many well-qualified persons to seek other employment after a few years.. The emergency activities which have centered in the county offices the past 2 or 3 years have to some extent again overtaxed the physical strength of individuals.

The employment of additional field and office assistants, the provision of more nearly adequate office space and equipment, the payment of the entire salary of the Extension worker from State and Federal funds, as is now being done in a number of States; the increased number of improved roads; and the progress being made in developing a technique of the profession are contributing to the length of tenure of office, and to the desirability of Extension teaching as a life work.

According to information obtained from 42 of the States, about 3 years ago, 25 States grant sabbatic leave to Extension specialists, and 19 grant such leave to county Extension workers also. Nine States at that time reported provision for the retirement of Extension workers upon reaching a specified age, or the completion of a certain number of years of service, or both. Working conditions, as well as salary schedules, are rapidly reaching the point where they are no longer serious barriers to lifelong service in Extension work.

Professional Consciousness and Professional Standards

The most important immediate problem in the development of Extension teaching as a specialized profession is the development of a dynamic consciousness on the part of the rank and file of Extension workers everywhere, that Extension teaching is a profession which offers remunerative satisfaction equal to most of the so-called learned professions. Extension house organs, State and national associations of Extension workers, including the national honorary extension fraternity, Epsilon Sigma Phi, are all contributing to the development of such a consciousness.

There needs to be a general awakening to arouse Extension workers to a realization of the individual's responsibility to the profession of which he or she is a part. The administrative and supervisory officers and the older, more experienced agents have a real responsibility to see that recent recruits understand the true purpose of Extension teaching, develop a respect for precise use of terminology, appreciate the importance of complete and accurate records and reports, familiarize themselves with professional literature, keep informed regarding studies of Extension procedure, maintain a scientific approach to their work, and gradually acquire a sense of loyalty to coworkers and obligation to the profession in which they are engaged.

Largely due, no doubt, to the nature of the work in which engaged, Extension workers frequently fail to give proper credit to research

agencies, other Extension workers, local leaders, farmers and farm women, commercial and other agencies, for their parts in the dissemination of information relating to improved practices in farming and homemaking. The giving of credit to those who help us never should be overlooked.

Extension agents are directly responsible for the training, help, and guidance of about 400,000 local leaders of various kinds, and therein comes the true test of whether or not we are great teachers. Our job is to help make each one in that group of 400,000 local leaders strong and important in the community in which each one lives. We are to give them our best thoughts and let them present those thoughts to the people as their own. Credit for accomplishment must be placed upon them. They must increase in importance in the work of the community, rather than ourselves. Your delight as Extension agents is in seeing them grow in ability and power. Your compensation lies in their appreciation of you and your own knowledge that you are accomplishing the greatest thing any man or woman can accomplish in life, and that is to help others grow.

Extension agents are contributing something to the field of education that is having a quickening effect on all teaching. Our teaching has the merit of being based on problems of greatest significance on the farm, in the home, the market place and community, and the taking of such immediate action as is required to meet effectively the needs of the situation. So much of the average teacher's time is taken and required to give the individual just the tools of learning, such as reading, mathematics, knowledge of language, science, the background of history, and philosophy. Ours is the practical application of all of these to the immediate problems of life, which is the ultimate aim of all the preparatory teaching of our schools and colleges.

And may I add just here another thought: Our knowledge of teaching through Extension has advanced a long way since we began our large expansion in Cooperative Extension in 1914. We may say today, perhaps, of Extension, as was said at that time of research - that knowledge of agriculture, brought about by research, was 25 years ahead of the practice of agriculture. So may we say today, thanks to our researches and experiences in Extension methods, that the method of our best Extension agents is 6 to 10 years ahead of the practices of our average agents.

So much is going on these days and is being tried out in all parts of the country that the agents who want to keep abreast of the profession must needs return to the college from time to time to refresh themselves and bring themselves up again to the ever-increasing knowledge of their profession. That is why we are so strongly in favor of sabbatic leave, and have been willing broadly to interpret the law whereby cooperative Extension funds, in modest degree, may be used for sabbatic leave and for research in Extension.

We will now bring this paper to a close, realizing fully we have not covered the field, but also realizing that no souls are saved after the first 15 minutes.

And these are some of the final thoughts we would leave with you:

For the man or woman who likes rural people and rural life, the man or woman who gets satisfaction out of helping people grow and live a larger and fuller life, the man or woman who likes work and action and likes to see accomplishments here and now, the man or woman who wants to make himself or herself live in the memory and hearts of others, we know of no greater opportunity than through the profession of Extension teaching. It is as significant as the Christian religion - in fact, knowing the opportunity and responsibility that rests upon those in Extension work, no man or woman can long be an Extension agent, engaged in the development of men and women, without becoming deeply religious. Extension expects technical knowledge of each of its members, but away beyond that it is expected that they shall be real men and real women. Extension forces are a small group, but the world is governed by minorities who have knowledge.

I have full faith that, if we continue to deal with the vital matters of life in our work, as we have been doing in the past; if we continue to serve men and women and youth so that they will grow, we shall increase in numbers, in influence, and in power with every passing year. We are a chosen group, sifted out by rural birth and training; again sifted by college training, apprenticeship and selection; and again sifted in the trying field of experience. Those who serve and are with us now are the ones who have been refined by fire. We can go back to our work from this conference knowing we have a place of significance in the world, a man's work to do.

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